DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 096 069 RC 008 111

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TITLE Appalachian Migrant Students in Cincinnati Public Schools.
PUB DATE Jul 73
NOTE 18p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Adjustment Problems; Cultural Background; *Culture Conflict; High School Students; Individual Instruction; Junior High School Students; *Migrants; *Relevance (Education); *Rural Urban Differences; Rural Youth; Student Adjustment; Student Characteristics; Student School Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Appalachia; Cincinnati; Ohio

ABSTRACT

In numerous midwestern industrial cities, the greatest influx of rural urban migrants is from the southern Appalachia region. The migrant mountaineer comes from a rural way of life which emphasizes individualism, traditionalism, self-reliance, and strong loyality to an extended family peer group. In the urban environment, the migrant finds himself in a culture that is time-oriented, organization conscious, and where peer groups develop from casual relationships. Many eventually adjust; a significant number, however, are unable to make the transition. Students and school personnel from 3 urban junior high schools in Cincinnati (Ohio) were interviewed. Appalachian students were identified by county of birth. The 8th grade Appalachian migrant student is approximately 13 1/2 years old, and probably was born in a southern Appalachian county. His family migrated to the city the year before he entered kindergarten, and he has attended at least 2 elementary schools prior to enrolling at the junior high level. His attitude toward school is neutral. He has average grades and attendance patterns; however, he normally will not participate in extracurricular activities. A model that would make urban schools more relevant to the Appalachian student includes 4 phases of growing involvement -- awareness, research, support, and action. (KM)

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APPALACHIAN MIGRANT STUDENTS IN CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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July 1973

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INTRODUCTION

According to demographers, the movement of rural people to urban industrial centers continues to accelerate yearly. In numerous midwestern industrial cities, the greatest influx of rural to urban migrants is from the southern Appalachian region. Estimates are that over three million people have migrated out of the region since the beginning of World War II.

The migrant mountaineer comes from a rural way of life which places emphasis on individualism, traditionalism, self-reliance, and strong loyalty to an extended family peer group. In the urban environment, the migrant finds himself in a culture that is time-oriented, organization conscious, and where peer groups develop from casual relationships. Many eventually adjust to the values of the new environment, or at least learn to cope with them.

A significant number of migrant Appalachians, however, are unable to adjust to the urban life style. They live throughout the metropolitan area, in the inner-city and in suburban enclaves, unseen and largely neglected by the schools, social agencies, and other institutions of our society.

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PURPOSES OF STUDY *

The general purpose of this research may be stated as a study of Appalachian migrant children attending urban schools with the specific aim of determining the status of Appalachian migrant children in certain urban junior high schools in the Cincinnati, Ohio area. Related objectives include a determination of those aspects of culture and heritage which may be beneficial or detrimental to the Appalachian's urban "adjustment" and the development of practical guidelines for school systems where there are large numbers of migrant Appalachians attending.

METHODOLOGY

Participant observation and interviewing, reported in a case study form, were the primary means of investigation. Students and school personnel from three urban junior high schools, selected to provide an economic and cultural cross-section of urban Appalachians, were interviewed. Appalachian students were identified on the basis of their county of birth. In all, a total of 72 persons — students, teachers, principals, counselors, agency personnel, community citizens, interested professionals, and noted authorities on Appalachian life -- were interviewed. A profile of the Appalachian migrant student was developed from the data.

THE APPALACHIAN MIGRANT STUDENT

A student of Appalachians living in urban centers soon becomes aware that they are a culturally different people. Their life style, thought patterns, and personality characteristics are

* performed with the cooperation of the Urban Appalachian Council and the Cincinnati Public Schools.

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based on an agrarian-frontier heritage rather than on the requirements of an urban industrial society. The following comparison of the contradictory nature of some characteristics of the mountain subculture and those of middle-class society is one means to illustrate how Appalachian migrant students differ from other students who attend urban schools.

Appalachians are Individuals in a Society that Demands Collective Action

The self-directed nature of Appalachian individualism is a prominent feature of the mountain subculture. The Appalachian continues to be an individualist after migration to an urban setting. In a non-derogative sense, he is a self-centered independent who looks out for himself and for his kin. Normally, he will not participate in groups or activities unless involvement appears to be immediately beneficial to himself, or perhaps to his family. Except for crisis situations, Appalachian parents do not become involved with the school.

Appalachians are Person-Oriented In a Society that is Impersonal

Today's mass society is one where relationships are based upon nonpersonal factors. Peer groups are developed from casual relationships and may be temporary, formed only for the immediate moment, to be disbanded and forgotten. Appalachian migrant students value and seek personal relationships with school personnel, employers, friends, and others. These relationships are based upon the personal qualities of the individuals, and not on status,

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income, education, or prestige. Appalachians have difficulty in coping with the impersonal and temporary nature of the junior high school. They fondly remember the personal nature of the elementary classroom where one teacher and thirty or so students stayed together throughout the day. In such a situation, unlike the junior high classroom, there was time to develop the close personal relationship Appalachians so desire.

Appalachians are Traditionalists in a Society that is Pragmatic and Goal-Oriented

It is the traditionalism of Appalachians, more than any other characteristic, that upperwardly mobile middle-class school teachers find the most difficult to understand. The average middle-class person is improvement-oriented. He forms long-range plans and is capable of deferring gratification to achieve his goals. Also, middle-class persons develop reasonable options for obtaining their goals and pragmatically make choices, as a rule, on the basis of goal achievement rather than other factors. Most Appalachian students, on the other hand, are traditionalistic in their outlook. They have limited time perspectives, value self and family above societal or personal goals, have little desire to plan ahead, and dislike change. Because Appalachians are traditionalistic and not future-oriented, school generally has minimal relevance to their life. In this view, school is not something upon which one can build a better life, but something that must be endured for the present. The Appalachian's traditionalistic approach is a major source of conflict between the school and the urban Appalachian student.

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Appalachians are Nonverbal In a Verbal Society

In today's society there is a tremendous need for language and verbal skills that extends throughout daily life—in reference to television, radio, books, records, tape cassettes, newspapers, and in daily conversation. In every aspect of modern life one needs verbal competence.

The Appalachian migrant student has a nonverbal heritage. The subculture's closed system has curtailed social interaction and verbal expression of one's ideas. Parents seldom express themselves verbally, or rarely plan an experience or action verbally, and the resultant silence begets more silence. The family does not discuss what has happened at school, at work, on the street, or in the world. There are few books and magazines in the home, and those present are seldom read. The nonverbal nature of the family and of the individual is reinforced at every turn. When the Appalachian student attends school, he is faced with a verbally-oriented society, one of whose representatives (the teacher) places great emphasis on the ability to read, to comprehend what has been read, and to express oneself verbally. Society demands a degree of verbalization that the Appalachian cannot approach, because he comes from a subculture of silence.

The Appalachian is Family Centered In a Society Where the Family Is Diminishing in Importance

In the case of the Appalachian migrant, the family is a two-edged sword; it is both a bridge and a barrier in his struggle to cope with the demands of a modern urban society. Sociologists

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tell us that in our modern society the family has grown less important and that individuals now seek to fulfill themselves and to look for help and direction outside of the family. The Appalachian continues, however, to remain loyal to the extended family. It is a means of support and security against the pressures of the urban environment. The extended family in the mountains serves as a refuge to which the urban Appalachian can return to find peace and quiet. Extended family members who live in the urban environment provide migrants with social and personal outlets that are familar and understood. At the same time, though, the family is a disadvantage, since it does not provide the training and skills that apparently are necessary for success in today's modern society. Even so, the distinguishing feature that sets the Appalachian family apart from the urban family is its emphasis on respect and loyalty to members of the extended family.

Education, Blacks, and Isolation

The discussion above is primarily concerned with the contrast in the personality traits and characteristics of the Appalachian migrant attending urban schools. These additional factors include the migrant's attitude toward education, his relationship to blacks, and social and economic isolation.

Attitude Toward Education: Schools are middle-class institutions and what is taught in them is based primarily upon the middle-class concept of education; that is, education is for personal and social advancement. In general, the Appalachian migrant student

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has little desire for education to improve his social class status or for the sake of his personal and intellectual development. Appalachian parents see little need for education beyond learning to read and write, and children receive very little parental encouragement. Education and intellectual thought are not a part of the Appalachian parent's world.

Appalachian parents may express verbal support for education, but their actions generally do not support the efforts of the school. Verbal expression of a faith in education as a means for self-improvement and personal advancement stems from the Appalachian's perception of what he believes middle-class society expects him to say, despite the fact that his own educational experience has not provided a path to success. To the mountaineer, family, physical ability, and other factors are more important than education. In the city education is trumpeted, however, as the path one follows to "get ahead." Appalachians do not find the educational system a reliable means for coping with the urban environment. Thus, while parents express verbal interest and support of the school, they passively permit their children to be truant and may actually encourage their sons and daughters to drop-out.

Blacks: One of the more difficult aspects of learning to cope with the urban environment results when Appalachian migrant's are suddenly exposed to a large number of Blacks. This is particularly true for the Appalachian migrant who lives in an inner-city ghetto, or for the migrant student who attends a school that is populated primarily by Black students. In the mountains,

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the Appalachian encountered few Black persons; one or two Blacks do not present a problem, but many Blacks may be very frightening to him. As a result of their limited face to face contact with them, Appalachians have difficulty in understanding the different manner in which Blacks react to given situations.

Because of their cultural heritage, Appalachians usually withdraw from threatening or frustrating situations. On the other hand, Blacks and other urban minorities often react with hostility and aggressiveness when faced with a threatening or frustrating situation. For example, when a teacher verbally assaults an Appalachian student, the Appalachian will divert his eyes to the wall and probably will not come back to the class the next day. A Black student, however, may react by physically threatening the teacher.

There are other differences. Because Appalachians value personal relationships, they are sensitive to comments, statements, gestures or actions which may threaten that relationship. Inner-city Black students, on the other hand are accustomed to pushing and shoving each other in a sporting and joking manner, calling each other names ("capping") or make threatening gestures or comments to friends. In other words, whereas Black students "kid" with each other as a means of expressing friendship, Appalachian students are overly sensitive to personal remarks or actions. Often, Appalachians do not perceive such behavior in the way it was intended, but as a verbal or physical threat to their well being.

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Unfortunately, many school staff members do not see such reactions on the part of Appalachian children as the result of their cultural differences but as an excuse to avoid school. While it may be true that some Appalachian students are using the black/white situation to escape from school, there does exist an air of tension between Appalachians and Blacks. It appears that much of the apprehension and misunderstanding stems directly from the cultural differences between the two minority groups.

Isolation: An important factor in the development of the Appalachian subculture was the geographic and social isolation of the mountains. The physical and social isolation the migrant knew in the mountains is often present in the city. Migrants tend to remain within themselves and within their families. The communities where they settle, because of location and the residents, are geographically and socially separated from other more affluent communities. A common characteristic of the three schools studied was each community's socio-economic isolation. All three schools have a narrow population range in terms of social class. Students and community residents have few opportunities for interaction with other cultural groups or social classes; this situation tends to reinforce the personality and cultural characteristics described above. In effect, what occurs is that, just as in the mountains, the Appalachian is place-bound. He does not want to leave his own little area and seeks schools and situations that are familiar to him. Isolation in the city becomes a defense and means to cope with the urban environment.

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A PROFILE OF THE APPALACHIAN MIGRANT STUDENT

The following profile of the urban Appalachian student is drawn from the data and information collected, analyzed, and discussed in the study.

The eighth grade Appalachian migrant student is approximately thirteen and one-half years old and, like his parents, probably was born in a southern Appalachian county. His family migrated to the city the year before he entered kindergarten, and he has attended at least two elementary schools prior to enrolling at the junior high level. There are four brothers and sisters in the family. Both of his parents work, usually at some form of unskilled labor. The student's extended family is large, with relatives living in the urban community and in the mountains. There is much visiting back and forth between relatives, both in the city and "down home." In the last summer vacation, he visited for about two weeks with his grandparents or an aunt and uncle in the mountains.

His attitude toward the school can only be described as neutral. School is required, something that must be endured. He prefers those teachers and administrators who are friendly and personable, those persons he feels he can talk to and trust. In turn, he will be open and friendly, showing respect for those persons who respect him. If placed in an uncompromising or difficult situation by a teacher or administrator, he will tend to withdraw rather than react aggressively or with hostility. (If the situation is too difficult, he just will not show up for school the next day.)

In many respects, he is like any other student. He has average grades and average atterdance patterns; however, he normally

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will not participate in extracurricular activities or join special interest groups. His career goals are vague and indefinite, and he has had very limited job experience.

If he attends a school where there are Blacks, he will not understand the Blacks and will tend to keep to himself or to associate only with other white students. If he is placed in a threatening situation, he normally will withdraw, not because he is afraid, but because he does not understand the more aggressive behavior of Black students. If pressed too hard, he simply will take actions to avoid future incidents (such as avoiding the lunchroom, the front hall, or, in the extreme situation, quit attending school.)

All in all, the Appalachian migrant student is a unique individual who, remarkably, has learned much about how to cope with the complexities of urban living, but still is far short of what might be termed a satisfactory adjustment in the new social setting. On the other hand, he has managed to maintain much that is positive in his cultural heritage. As a student, he is little understood by his teachers, counselors, and administrators.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAKING THE SCHOOL A BETTER PLACE FOR APPALACHIAN MIGRANT STUDENTS

Schools are institutions comprised of individuals; those who run schools, as well as those who attend schools, are individuals. Appalachian students are not recognized (much less understood) by the urban school systems which profess themselves to be the path out of the ghetto into middle-class affluence. For the most part,

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Appalachian migrant students are third class citizens. But the school must be responsive to the needs of the community it serves. The individuals who control the institutions must be willing to go more than half-way in meeting the needs of the Appalachian community. Only in this way can urban schools become a better place for Appalachian students.

The model discussed below for making schools a better place for Appalachian students is one that is applicable to social agencies, law enforcement agencies, schools, or entire metropolitan areas. The model includes four phases of growing involvement, beginning with awareness and followed by research, support, and action.

Awareness: Appalachian migrants are the second largest cultural minority residing in many midwestern cities. Certainly, the first step an urban institution must take is to recognize the Appalachian migrant as a separate and distinct urban constituency; a constituency that is culturally different from other groups of urban dwellers. Urban schools can experience greater success in educating Appalachian migrants if priorities are re-arranged so that feelings and interpersonal relations are thought of as highly as the mere transmission of ideas and information. Such a reordering can occur only after educational policy-makers gain a greater awareness of Appalachian values and expectations and how they conflict with the curriculum and educational philosophy of middle-class American schools.

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The second step is to develop an institutional and individual awareness of the Appalachian as a person. Once an institution, or an individual, exhibits an awareness and sensitivity to the differences of urban minorities, members of the urban minority group will find it easier to deal with that institution or individual. Recognition and awareness of the Appalachians as the Cincinnati community's second largest cultural minority, and awareness of their cultural differences is a positive, but only the first, step to understanding.

Research: At present, urban school systems have little information or knowledge about the Appalachian migrant in the city. The educational decision-makers do not know who their Appalachian students are, how they differ from other students in the school, why they succeed or do not succeed, or why some students attend school and others do not. School persons have very little knowledge about how the middle-class oriented curriculum affects Appalachian students and little, if any, consideration has been given to which teaching methods or curriculum materials may be most suitable for teaching these culturally different students. Merely being aware of the problem or publicly stating an awareness of its existence is not enough. The school system must initiate research efforts of its own in an effort to find the answers to many of these questions. If the schools cannot initiate their own research, they must be willing to support those qualified outside agencies or groups who are willing to conduct the research.

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Support: The limit of the resources of a major urban institution such as a school system are virtually unknown. But the untapped energies must not be wasted by duplicating the efforts and responsibilities of other urban institutions. First, in its research efforts, the school system should support other efforts by providing data and data access to those groups or individuals who wish to conduct research regarding Appalachian and other rural migrants in the urban community. At the same time, the school should try to determine which agencies are currently providing services or conducting research regarding migrants. The school's role should be one of supporting those agencies which are providing such service. The schools can avoid costly duplication by making a major effort to match individual and collective resources to meet the needs of Appalachian citizens.

Action: Finally, on the basis of the above efforts, school systems in urban areas must develop action oriented programs to provide services to meet Appalachian needs as revealed by the research. Such action efforts may require special in-service programs to develop on the part of school personnel an awareness of Appalachians. Action programs may require changes in curriculum and the retraining of teachers in new curriculum methods. Changes in school attendance areas also may be necessary. The programs may be varied and many, but the school and the individuals within the system must begin redirecting their energies in order to provide as complete and full an educational opportunity as possible for all students who live within the urban community it serves.

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SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL

There are those within the urban school system who recognize the Appalachian student as a student who is culturally different, as one who walks a different road in seeking his life in American society. These individuals--teachers, counselors, principals, supervisors--are striving to meet the needs and understand the Appalachian migrant student. The following are offered as aids to achieving the understanding.

1. Undoubtedly, the most important factor in effectively teaching the urban Appalachian--and for that matter, any culturally different child--is teacher acceptance.

2. The context for understanding the urban Appalachian is his mountain heritage. The Appalachian personality, characteristics and attitudes have evolved over generations of coping with poverty, deprivation, and an unyielding environment. When the mountaineer leaves his mountain home for the urban environment his characteristics remain virtually unchanged.

3. The Appalachian is person-oriented. He is unlikely to accept an individual on the basis of the individual's authority, status, prestige, the way he dresses, or similar measures of middle-class life. Acceptance of a teacher will be based upon the personal qualities of understanding, empathy, trust and friendliness.

4. The individualized approach to learning may be one way to provide Appalachian migrant students with personalized learning situations. If the teaching materials rely too heavily on impersonal program materials and teaching machines, however, this approach will be no better than large group instruction. The important factor is for the instruction be personal and as close to a one-to-one relationship between the student and teacher as possible.

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5. One way in which schools tend to reflect middle-class values is their insistence upon setting long-range goals and delaying gratification in achieving them. The Appalachian youth does not operate from a base of academic success, and his emphasis is on the present rather than the future. School personnel must consider this fact when setting goals and assignments for these students. Long-range assignments should be broken into a series of short-term tasks which can be evaluated daily and personal encouragement given.

6. The Appalachian student is not a verbal student. Situations where he must speak out, or express an opinion, are especially unsettling. His ability to read, or to understand and comprehend what has been read, may be greatly affected by his non-verbal background.

CONCLUSIONS

Appalachians, like society around them, are changing. The mountains, as well as the mountaineer's reaction to the urban environment, are changing. What exist today will undoubtedly be different in five or ten years.

This study reveals the institutional disregard for Appalachian migrants living in midwestern urban centers. Urban school personnel, from decision-makers to classroom teachers, acknowledge pluralism and cultural diversity in American society. But, for the last three decades, the Appalachian migrant has been overlooked in policy decisions and program development. Now, second, and even third, generation migrant children are attending urban schools that have little relevance to their way of life. They are children born in the urban community, but who, because of strong family ties, are still very much Appalachian. They are a large, but silent, urban minority.

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In many respects, those who attend urban junior high schools, whether Black, Appalachian, or middle-class whites, are very similar. Middle-class whites, though, achieve their goals and obtain services on the basis of the power resulting from their status. Urban minority groups do not operate from the same power base. Over the past decade Blacks have obtained a new level of power because of their growing cultural awareness and willingness to confront those who lead the institutions. Appalachians, because of their heritage, do not confront the school and, therefore, are often neglected by the institution. For Blacks, the problem is one of cultural recollection and growth. For Appalachians, it is one of cultural preservation.

Schools are middle-class institutions. But many urban dwellers, particularly Appalachians, are tradition-oriented. Appalachians attempt to maintain their heritage in the alien urban setting through their life style. Because they are not in a position of power, Appalachians are unable to preserve, transmit and maintain their heritage through the schools. The question boils down simply to one of preservation. Are the schools going to recognize the Appalachian as a unique and different individual, or are the urban schools going to continue to profess their belief in cultural pluralism, but fail to meet the needs of a large urban subculture?

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On this point, Jesse Stuart, the Appalachian poet-author, has said:

> "Should it matter where a man is born—
> a shack, a cottage, or a palace? Does his
> environment make him or does his blood tell?
> This is an old question and we'll not
> debate it here. The only thing is, I
> pray that it really doesn't matter."